

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims according to the following listing of the claims, which should replace all previous versions of the claims.

Claim Listing

1 – 25. (Canceled)

26. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a component, comprising:

continuously providing a plurality of aluminum-coated steel blanks at a first rate to a first continuous process, wherein the first continuous process comprises:

successively heating [[an]]each of the plurality of aluminum-coated steel blanks to an austenization temperature in a first furnace selected from the group consisting of a continuous furnace and a revolving furnace;

successively, rapidly cooling [[said]]each of the blanks;

storing said heat-treated blank at room temperature for an interval of time;

successively removing each of the blanks from the first continuous process;

placing each of the blanks in an intermediate storage;

cooling each of the blanks in the intermediate storage to form a plurality of sheet bars, each having a martensitic structure;

in a second continuous process that is decoupled from the first continuous process:

retrieving at least one of the plurality of sheet bars from the intermediate storage with a transport device;

supplying the at least one sheet bar to an induction furnace via the transport device at a second rate that is different from the first rate;

heating said cooled, heat-treated blank a second time the at least one sheet bar in the induction furnace to an austenization temperature greater than or equal to 850°C; and

forming said blank while heated the heated sheet bar to produce said component.

27. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the ~~interval of the initial heating of said blank is~~ residence time in the first furnace is in the range of 9 to 30 minutes.
28. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the conditions of ~~the second heat treatment~~ in the induction furnace are controlled so as not to increase the layer thickness of the ~~blank~~ sheet bar.
29. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 wherein the ~~interval of the subsequent heating of said blank~~ residence time in the induction furnace is in the range of 10 seconds to 2 ½ minutes.
30. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 ~~including, further comprising~~ comprising varying the heat applied to different portions of the surface of the blank.
31. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26 ~~including, further comprising~~ comprising reinforcing said blank between the first heating and the second heating.
32. (Cancelled)
33. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 26, ~~wherein the first heating step causes~~ further comprising causing an increase in layer thickness of the aluminum coating.
- 34 – 44. (Cancelled)
45. (New) The method according to claim 26, wherein the transport device is an articulated arm robot.